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ABSTRACT

Twenty college students from American Indian, Chicano, Anglo and Black ethnic backgrounds were recruited to work in the Cross-Age Peer Relationship Project. They became involved in a program of educational remediation and facilitation for junior high age youth from similar backgrounds. Each counselor trainee was assigned a junior high school in order to work cooperatively with the school faculty to organize recreational activities and assist in the classroom. Each counselor trainee also conducted group counseling sessions under the supervision of the project director. The program results indicate that the minority youth responded positively to the project. A followup of the participants indicates that all are still in school, and all are doing creditable work. (SJL)

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Effects of Cross-Age Peer Relationships

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History

Project Catch-Up* operated on the campus of Western Washington State College from the Summer of 1966 through the Summer of 1972 (Mason, 1968; Mason, 1969a; Mason 1969b; Mason, 1971; Mason, 1974 and Mason and Locasso, 1972). Follow-up evaluation** of the summer participants was completed in the Spring of 1975. Project Catch-Up was designed as a six-week summer residence program of educational remediation and facilitation for junior high age youth from American Indian, Chicano and Anglo ethnic backgrounds. The essential intent of the program was to reduce the expected high school drop-out rate, increase self-concepts and the ability to plan realistically for the future and to improve academic achievement. The follow up evaluation of the seven year program indicated some decrement in school dropout rate when the students were compared with the expected dropout rate for area schools and a statistically significant increment in academic performance as measured by standardized tests.

The professional staff, with the exception of the Director, for the summer programs was drawn from able public school teachers, but an integral part of the program was the relationship of junior counselors with the junior high students. Each summer college students from similar ethnic backgrounds were selected to organize recreational activities, assist in the classroom and conduct bi-weekly group

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counseling sessions. Because of the demonstrated ability of the college age students to relate effectively with the junior high age participants a new program was designed to evaluate the effect of cross-age peer relationships on the total learning process of the participant group. A proposal was submitted to the Office of Child Development in December, 1972, requesting funds to operate summer programs in 1973 and 1974 with an enlarged junior counselor staff and to use these college students as follow-up consultants in the public schools during the academic years of 1973-1974 and 1974-1975. The College was notified of the approval of the grant proposal in June, 1973, much too late to organize a summer program. Permission was requested and granted to reverse the exposure of the counselor trainees by having them work in the public schools prior to their summer experience.

During the academic year of 1973 and 1974 twenty college students were recruited to volunteer as tutors in the area public schools and to receive guidance at the College from the Project Director, other faculty members interested in educational problems of minority students and the Field Representative of Project Catch-Up. A summer program was conducted in 1974 with the usual public school teachers as staff members and an enlarged staff of counselor trainees. The participants from the 1974 summer program were followed during the academic year 1974-1975 utilizing the staff of Project Catch-Up. The grant for the Cross-Age Peer Relationship Study was transferred to the Office of Youth Development. A visit to the campus in the fall of 1974 by the Director of the Office of Youth Development indicated that in her judgment the summer program was not innovative, that the

effectiveness of the program had already been demonstrated and that unless we could come up with a new slant the funding for the second year of the project would not be forthcoming. We were unable to obtain guidelines for the submission of a second proposal, funds were not obtainable through the Washington State Department of Education, so in actuality the project operated for one academic year, September 1973 through August 1974. The following is a summary of the activities of the Counselor trainees during the academic year, 1973-1974 and of the summer program 1974.

Counselor Trainee Program, 1973-1974

The Education Department, the College of Ethnic Studies, the Black Student Union, the Association of American Native Students, and Mencha Association of Chicano students were contacted for volunteers to work in the Cross-Age Peer Relationship Project during the academic year 1973-1974. Twenty students from American Indian, Chicano, Anglo and Black ethnic backgrounds were recruited. Each students was assigned a junior high school in the area and each student was expected to work cooperatively with the school faculty to organize programs that would be coordinated with the existing school day. Activities ranged from individual tutoring of students likely to be selected for the summer program and former Project Catch-Up graduates to organizing a course in Chicano History presented as part of the curriculum in one school.

The local school districts were quite receptive to the counselor trainee program. Since many of the districts had economic problems resulting in some overcrowded classes the administrators welcomed

assistance from capable undergraduate students.

In addition, the counselor trainees met bi-weekly on campus to share with each other the strengths and weaknesses of their experiences in the schools and to consult with experts on the campus about particular educational problems of minority students. Attendance remained good at these meetings throughout the academic year. The practicum opportunity seemed to be a valuable experience for the students prior to their student teaching experience.

From the 20 counselor trainees eight were selected to participate in the summer program. These included two Blacks, two American Indians, one Chicano and three Anglos.

Summer Program, 1974

In addition to the Project Director, the staff included the Project Co-Director, a M.Ed. graduate from an E.P.D. Fellowship Program for Experienced Teachers of the Disadvantaged; two English teachers, two math teachers, two science teachers, an art teacher and the eight counselor trainees.

Thirty-five students were selected from over 100 referrals made by public school administrators, teachers, and counselors on the basis of their observations of evidence of academic potential, performance below potential and evidence of socio-economic deficit. Ten of the junior high age students were from American Indian background, seven were Chicano, seventeen were Anglo and one was Black. One Anglo girl was asked to leave the program, but all others completed the six week session successfully.

All staff and counselor trainees lived in an attractive dormitory

with the 35 junior high age participants. Two students were assigned to a room and meals were available at the student dining hall. Academic classes were organized during the morning and recreational activities were structured during afternoons and evenings with the counselor trainees taking charge. Participants were expected to make a decision about the activities they wished to engage in and to follow through with the commitment they made.

A Project newspaper was published weekly, several camping trips were organized, swimming was available in the campus pool and nearby lakes, art activities extended into after hours, and some recreational activities centered around dorm living.

Group counseling sessions were conducted bi-weekly with each counselor trainee talking regularly with three or four participants about their reactions to the program, their concerns about their own school situation and what personal concerns they wished to share. These counseling sessions were supervised by the Project Director.

Academic classes were held in the morning -- some in the dormitory and some in the regular college classrooms made available to the Project. Instruction in English, math and science was organized on an individual basis, designed to offer each student as much success as possible in a more relaxed school atmosphere. Class attendance was good and the students responded positively, working hard at their own level.

The six week summer session was culminated by an award dinner in the student dining room with a recognition made for the particular excellence of each participant and each staff member. This included the final publication of the student newspaper and a list of

participants, staff and accomplishments. The dinner was organized by a committee of participants and junior counselors.

Follow-Up for 1974-75

Because the Project was not funded by the Office of Youth Development for the second year follow up of the participants was maintained by the Project Catch-Up staff. All participants are in school and all are doing a creditable job. Some contact is maintained through volunteer services of staff personnel and some by the counselor trainees.

One Black counselor trainee is a counselor for minority students at the University of Seattle, another is working on a M.Ed. in special education, and the Chicano counselor trainee has been assured a teaching position in his local school district which has a large Chicano population. The remainder of the counselor trainees are completing their credentials to become public school teachers. As in previous years, the public school teachers of the summer program have reported tremendous gains in their awareness of the types of problems students from minority groups face and the counselor trainees feel they are much better able to cope with the problems of the classroom with the additional practicum experience.

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Financial Statement

In the original budget categories of the $79,610 grant, $500 was allocated for a typewriter, and $100 for an adding machine. Permission was requested and granted from the Office of Youth Development to apply these funds to the supply expenditures for the academic program and recreational activities during the summer.